

INDEXA



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A52FH—Thimphu, Bhutan *by Vincent Denecker, G0LMX/F5MBO*

Our trip to Bhutan was the result of more than five years of effort and planning by Alain, F6ANA, with the help of the French group, "Les Amis du Bhutan," and Dr. Pommaret is a world authority on the culture and society of Bhutan. She is well-known and highly respected in Bhutan where she has been given the name "Tashi Om" as a mark of recognition. She was very supportive of Alain's project and followed it through at the highest level of the Bhutanese government.

At the end of March 2000, the Government of Bhutan introduced the Telecommunications Act 2000, a broad legislation covering all aspects of telecommunications and allowing in particular the reintroduction of amateur radio. Françoise immediately passed the good news to Alain, F6ANA, who began making plans for an expedition. The first task was to assemble the operators, all members of the Clipperton DX Club.

- Denise, F6HWU (YL)
- Gérard, F2VX (CDXC President)
- Alain, F6ANA
- Alain, F5LMJ (CDXC Secretary)
- Vincent, G0LMX/F5MBO

Any visitor to Bhutan must go through a tour operator, and we used the services of Etho Metho Tours on the recommendation of



The A52FH Team: F6HWU, F5LMJ, G0LMX, F2VX, F6ANA

Françoise. Mrs. Dago Beda, the managing director, was extremely helpful and did a very professional job of dealing with the local authorities (including visa, customs clearance and amateur radio license) and sorting the details of our stay in Thimphu. Glenn Johnson, W0GJ, also gave us some very useful tips based on his own experience as organizer of the A52A operation of May 2000.

The policy of the Bhutanese kingdom is to control tourism in order to prevent undue disruption of the culture and of the environment. The cost of the visa is US \$200 per day, but it includes accommodation and all meals, as well as the service of a guide and a driver. By our standards this is not a bad value but it has the effect of limiting the number of

visitors and the duration of their stays. Only 5,000 visitors entered the country in 1997 (100 a week).

Only one airline serves Bhutan: Druk Air, the national Royal Airline. One of the main difficulties for us as a DXpedition was the strictly applied weight limit for baggage: 20 kgs including hand luggage. This meant careful planning of equipment. After the Ministry of Communications agreed that for a nominal fee we could use one of the A3S tribanders left by the A52A team, we decided that we would carry the rest of the equipment with us. This meant taking light transceivers (TS50 and IC706) and wire and vertical antennas, but at least we did not have to worry about air shipping to Bhutan. It was probably the right decision in view of the difficulties experienced by the A52 team and of the unexpected reduction in Druk Air cargo capacity.

The team became known to the Bhutanese authorities as the "French Hams," and the Bhutan Telecommunications Authority issued, appropriately, the callsign "A52 French Hams." The license was handed to F2VX, F6ANA, and F5LMJ when they met with Mrs. Dago Beda and Françoise Pommaret in Paris in mid-August to discuss the last details of our trip.

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Getting There

A glance at the atlas is enough to show that Bhutan is not the easiest of destinations. Paro is at the bottom of a valley 2200m above sea level, but the surrounding Himalayan mountains climb to a far greater altitude, well above 4000m. All landings and takeoffs in Paro are by visual flight rules, and the smallest change in the weather at Paro means that flights can be disrupted for days at a time. During the monsoon season, from June to September, this is a likely event.

We arrived at Paro on September 3rd after more than 16 hours of flying time. Landing at Paro is breathtaking. The approach is above several mountaintops, then through several valleys, and then the plane finally banks sharply and lands at the strip.

Setting foot on this amazing land was a very moving moment, particularly for Alain, F6ANA, who had planned this trip for so many years.

A52FH

Our hotel in Thimphu, the Pinewood Hotel, was already familiar with the ways of amateur radio because it had been host to the A52A group in May. We were fortunate to be the only guests at the hotel, so we had total freedom to organize ourselves and to use the eight rooms of the hotel as we wished. We first installed various wire antennas and a GPA30 vertical. Then we set up four stations in four different rooms according to the antenna positions.

The hotel staff was extremely helpful and already well-trained by the A52A team in the art of installing aerials. They climbed up trees without apparent effort to attach dipoles and other antennas.

The advantage of wire antennas was that we were able to make our first QSO only a couple of hours after our arrival at the hotel. The G5RV in particular proved to be a very versatile and quiet antenna that we could use on all bands from 80m to 10m.

Initially we were unable to locate the A3S tribander that the A52A expedition had left behind and which the Ministry of Communications agreed that we could

use. At this point we met Yeshey Dorji. Dorji was given the task by MOC to set up the first Radio Club of Bhutan, A51AA. Through him we found the tower and the antenna in various places in Thimphu. Some of the tower parts had been lost but a local metal worker was able to create substitute parts. Some of the A3S parts were also missing, and we had to do some DIY with parts from other antennas left by the A52A team.

The effort was worthwhile. The A3S made a big difference with stronger signals and longer openings to Europe and more contacts with the USA. However, even with the Yagi, contacts were still difficult to make for various reasons. Thimphu lies at the bottom of a valley, at an elevation of 2300m, surrounded by mountains 4000m and higher. Power is restricted to 100 watts. And, finally, there was a strong 57/58 local noise in the early evening making reception very difficult on almost all bands.

We also found that from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. there was almost no propagation except for a few VU and UA9 stations. Although disappointing from a radio point of view, it at least meant that we could spend some time exploring this lovely and fascinating country. Consequently, most of our contacts were made at night.

It was a surprise when Peter, ON6TT, showed up at the hotel one evening. I knew he would come to Bhutan as part of his job with WFP, but I thought it would be later in the year. Peter had obtained the call sign A52TT but he kindly agreed to sign as A52FH for the duration of our operation. He also operated as A51AA.

The A51AA Radio Club

One of the great satisfactions of this trip was the assistance that we were able to give toward the establishment of the A51AA radio club station in Thimphu.

We took time off our normal radio schedule to set up the new station, give initial amateur radio training, and

make demonstration QSOs. Our view was that it was better for the future, and more in line with ham radio spirit, to help develop amateur radio in Bhutan rather than try to maximize at all cost our number of QSOs.

The A51AA station is located in the north end of Thimphu, in a new building with four bedrooms for visiting radio hams. For the initial operation, we installed a Cushcraft R8 vertical left by A52A, a 40/80 dipole donated by the Clipperton DX Club, a Yaesu FT900, a Kenwood TS440, and a FL2100Z linear. The first QSO was made on 12 September 2000 between Thinley Dorji, Director of the Bhutan Telecommunications Authority, and A52FH operated by our friend Yeshey Dorji at the Pinewood Hotel 5 km away.

The A3S Yagi that we had at the Pinewood Hotel has now been moved to A51AA, and there are plans for large aerials on four towers. Yeshey Dorji and his business partner Kesang Namgyel have set up Sophun Tours & Treks to organize amateur radio trips to Bhutan and welcome visiting hams at the A51AA Ham Centre in Thimphu. Further information can be found on their web site at <http://www.sophun.com.bt> or by e-mail at sophun@druknet.net.bt.

Statistics

In 11 days of operation, we made around 13,700 QSOs from the Pinewood Hotel using the A52FH call-sign. These included 6,600 in CW (operators F6HWU, F5LMJ, G0LMX), and 7,100 in SSB (operators F2VX, F6ANA, G0LMX, ON6TT).

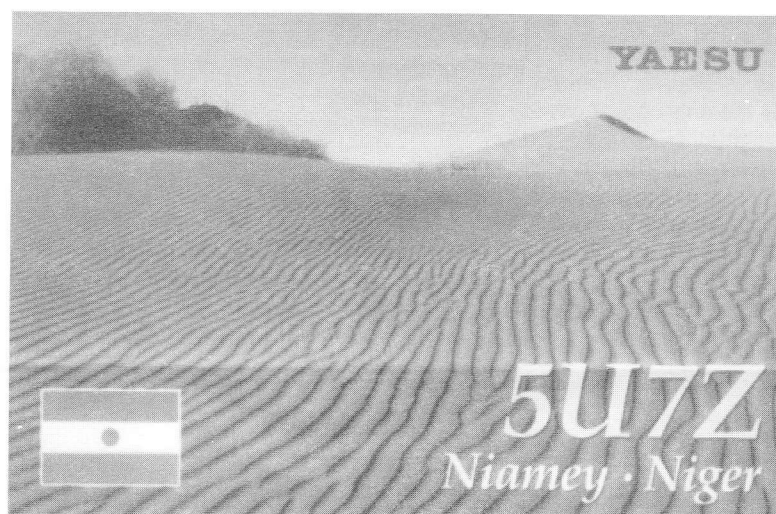
We also made 933 QSOs from the club station A51AA, so 14,599 QSOs have been made in total by the A52 French Ham team.

Acknowledgements

The A52FH team thanks INDEXA and many other supporters for helping to make this DXpedition a reality.

For more information and photographs about A51AA and A52FH, please visit our web site at: <http://www.multimania.com/cdx>.

7X and 5U7Z

DXpedition to Niger by Franz Langner, DJ9ZB

Niger, a semi-rare country on the amateur bands, has been without permanent activity for the last 5 years. Baldur, DJ6SI, and I wanted to put a country on air that hadn't been on for a long time so we began to plan for a small DXpedition from Africa. We worked for several months to obtain a license from the Post and Telecommunication (D.G.P.N.) in Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger.

Niger is located at the interior of North Africa and is landlocked by seven countries. The topography of the country is mostly arid desert and mountains. It has an area of 489,189 sq. mi. and has a population of 9.8 million of which 400,000 live in the capital of Niamey. Half the country's income is derived from farming which is pursued by more than 90% of the people.

After months of planning and coordination, we finally decided to bring Niger on the air during the last week of January, 2000. On 24 January, I met Baldur at the Charles de Gaulle (CDG) Airport in Paris to take the Air France non-stop flight, AF-730, to Niamey. After a 7-hr. flight we arrived at the Niamey International Airport at 6 p.m. local time. Niger is 1-hr. ahead of UTC. We began the immigration process and declared all of our equipment for customs before we were allowed to enter. Dan, AE5RP/5U7DG, a pilot working for S.I.M., picked us up from the airport by car and brought us to

the S.I.M. guesthouse where we would stay during our 5 days of operation.

The next day we arranged a morning meeting with the licensing officer at D.G.P.N. Baldur got the call 5U7X and I obtained 5U7Z. The licenses were signed and

completed the next day.

Our equipment was a Yaesu FT-900 ATC, a Yaesu FT-890 ATC, a DAIWA Power Supply SS-330X, a Windom FD4, and a Cushcraft R-7000.

We set up the FD4 and R-7000 Cushcraft vertical and made the first QSO at 1255 UTC on 28 MHz with UA3DNR. We found good openings to the USA and Japan on 17, 21, 12, and 10 meters.

In the mornings we would start by working JAs and the Pacific. As the skip moved, we worked Asians and Europeans.

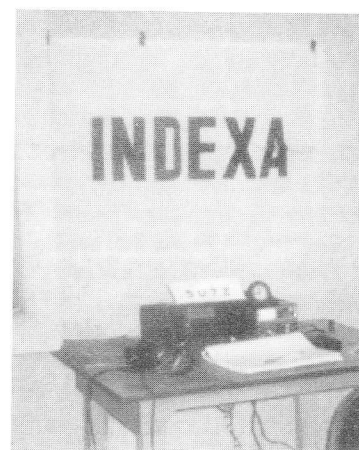
Dan, 5U7DG, and his wife, Lisa, invited us for dinner at his house and we had a nice evening together. He is working with an IC-706 and a Hy-Gain TH6DXX on a 12 meter tower. There

are two more licensed hams in Niger, 5U7CF (YL) and 5U7DF, both American citizens.

The operation was highly successful. We logged 12,550 QSOs in CW and SSB. For the Europeans a big "thanks!" for standing by when I asked.

We thank Lisa and Dan, 5U7DG, for their great assistance and help during our stay in Niamey. We also thank Mr. Adamou, D.G.P.N.; W4WMQ; DJ2AA; DG0ZB; DJ3HJ; and DL6GV. I would also like to personally thank the following: INDEXA (International DX Association); SDXG (South Germany DX Group); GDXF (Germany DX Foundation); EUDXF (European DX Foundation); Funkamateure, Berlin; and Yaesu, Germany.

Cu from the next one!



INDEXA Director Franz Langner, DJ9ZB, gave INDEXA a bold presence from Niger.

New Life Members.....

LA8CJ NS6B K5SLW and K3BM

Extra Help Provided By.....

N6FUN	W6NIZ	K6ME	N3AE	K3BM	WA8JBG	W5VCS	N7DV
KP4EDW	BX6AA	EA5BY	KB7V	CT1CSN	N8BEE	K7HEN	JE1TGL
WB6ROH	K2SJ	K4JUJ	K8ZZU	KA2PHQ	K2HWE	VE7OJ	W3DR
W5VW	WA8BIJ	AE2N	N2JT	AB4HR	W2TUJ	K4TY	KC5AC
K4ULA	WF6Z	K1KU	VE3IQ	K5SLW	K5QM	KI8ED	K7TNJ
KB2POR	W9AEB	WA1PEC	K3FK	W0GJ	WA5PAE	W2CVW	and
WB9YPD							

More about Thimphu and Bhutan excerpted and condensed from "A52FH—Bhutan" by Vincent Denecker, G0LMX/F5MBO

Bhutan is the size of Switzerland but it is sparsely inhabited with only 600,000 inhabitants. The population of the capital city, Thimphu, is only 40,000.

The country has a lot of charm. Situated in the eastern Himalayas between India and Tibet, the mountains are magnificent.

The influence of the west is clearly visible but traditions are also very important and are still very much alive. Cautiously, the country is opening up to modern lifestyles. The Telecommunications Act 2000 is an example. Not only amateur radio is now allowed but television as well! A TV station started to broadcast in Thimphu

this summer—only one hour a day at the moment, but it is a beginning. The Internet is also becoming available in Bhutan; however, Thimphu is probably still the only capital city in the world without traffic lights.

Most of all, it is the people of Bhutan who leave the deepest impression. They are really lovely people: open, smiling, helpful, friendly, and always keen to learn new things. Thanks to our Bhutanese friends for adding a human (sometimes spiritual) dimension to this trip.

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by
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